

The Kenneth Dahlberg Story

By WILLIAM N. HESS

At 0530 on the morning of 16 December 1944, the silence of the Ardennes Front between Monschau, Germany, on the north and Echternach, Luxembourg, on the south was shattered by the bombardment of German artillery. The 85 mile distance separating these two towns had become known as the "Ghost Front" due to the lack of activity on either side of the Siegfried Line. Then the German forces decided to take advantage of a great weather front that would shroud all of northern Europe in fog and snow squalls to launch their major offensive. Hitler's last panzer and infantry divisions jumped off on a drive designed to split the Allied forces by fighting their way westward to cross the Meuse River and then to take the port cities of Brussels and Antwerp. The Battle of the Bulge had begun!

As U. S. infantry divisions reeled before the on-rushing hordes, the aircraft of the 9th Air Force did their best to impede German progress by bombing and strafing under rapidly deteriorating weather conditions. By the 19th of December the weather was all but impossible for flying, but due to the critical situation a few missions were dispatched into the cold, gray overcast to strike at the enemy.

One such mission involved 12 heavily laden P-47s of the 353rd Fighter Squadron, 354th Fighter Group. The Thunderbolts were led by a wiry, tousle-haired fighter ace from Wisconsin--Capt. Kenneth H. Dahlberg. This was his first combat mission in the Republic-built aircraft, but at least he had been familiarized on the plane back in the United States, which was more than could be said for most of the pilots in the formation. The Group had just reluctantly said goodbye to their trusty P-51 Mustangs in which they had scored many successes, and now they were relegated to the massive "Jug."

Slung under each P-47 wing was a 500-lb bomb destined for the Headquarters of two German panzer divisions near Pruem, Germany. Steadily the formation droned towards its target, and Dahlberg constantly twisted his neck from side to side to observe his followers and to peer above for an enemy that might be lurking.

Then the fateful call came on the radio, "Bandits, 40 plus, coming up on an interception course." There would be no bombing of the target now! Salvoing their bombs, the P-47s immediately made their move to attack. Suddenly the Messerschmitt 109s veered away with the Americans in hot pursuit. Down they dove with engines screaming and the heavy Thunderbolts rapidly building up their famous diving speed. Then all Hades broke out about them. Black puffs and white puffs from the ground exploded and arcing tracers sent fiery fingers probing for targets. The German planes had led them into a flak trap!

Twisting and weaving, eight of the P-47s managed to hang together, but four members had been forced to break away to escape the intense antiaircraft fire. Still hurtling after the 109s, their rapid closure speed took them roaring into the gaggle with all guns blazing. Lining up on one of the 109s, Dahlberg pressed right in on his tail, hit the gun turret and blew him to pieces. Immediately he cleared his tail, slid in behind another and broke him up in a ball of fire.

Like an angry group of hornets the Thunderbolts dove in and out of the gaggle of German fighters and shot them down. In the mad melee of swirling aircraft

Dahlberg sent another 109 crashing into the ground, and a fourth victim headed down streaming smoke and flame. When he was able to get his squadron back together, nine Germans had been shot from the sky, and the balance had broken up and run for home.

Though victorious, Dahlberg was unhappy when he brought his brood home to roost. "We didn't lose any-one, but the Luftwaffe was successful because it prevented us from carrying out our bombing mission." Ken claimed four 109s for the day but had to settle for a probable on the last one as nobody saw it go in. Regardless, it was another great day for the fabled ace of the "Flying Cobras" Squadron.

During an interview a few days later, he was asked to comment on the tactics that were responsible for his success. "Keep driving! First of all, pick one plane as your definite target, go after him like everything, and when you've given him the works, check your tail immediately."

These words spoken in the midst of World War II, regarding the combat tactics employed by Dahlberg, are equally effective as a summary of his combat career. They not only symbolize his brilliant actions in the skies but also his reaction to misfortunes during the war. Twice he evaded the enemy and occupied the efforts of scores of German troops on a third fateful occasion when he was finally taken prisoner.

Ken Dahlberg's story is not one that is typical of the fighter pilots who rose to acedom during World War II. He was never smitten by the aviation bug as a boy on his parents' farm in Wilson, Wisconsin. Farm chores and the outdoor life to be enjoyed amongst myriad lakes of that part of the country consumed his early years. He moved to St. Paul, Minnesota his senior year in high school, and after graduation he enrolled in Notre Dame University to further his education.

A burning desire to enter the field of business took him from the campus, and Dahlberg went to work for the Albert Pick Hotel chain in Chicago. It was there that he began to show the drive and initiative that would carry him so far in later life. Rising from the most menial tasks in a few short years, he elevated himself to travelling supervisor for this national establishment.

When the drums of war began to roll, Ken could see that his days in the hotel business were numbered. He entered the Army in November 1941 and was assigned to the Coast Artillery. If there is a relationship between experience with a hotel chain and the culinary arts, it is hard to define, but Dahlberg found himself in cooks school at Ft. Eustis, Virginia, graduating in January 1942. His diploma is still one of his prized possessions, but the hot kitchen held no fascination for him. Soon after he decided that there must be better jobs, even in the service.

The Aviation Cadet program that was being so highly touted on bases throughout the country looked good to Ken, and he wasted no time in putting an application through channels. Approval came rapidly and the young aspirant was soon on his way to California for preflight training. His first taste of flying came at the Primary Training School at Palo Alto Airport in King City, California, during the summer of 1942. Here he learned to fly the Ryan PT-22 which was affectionately labeled the "Maytag Messerschmitt." Dahlberg reported his progress to his family at this point as "just one ride ahead of

a wash ride," but apparently he proved an apt pupil for he proceeded to Chico Army Flying School for basic flight training. Air progress and proficiency came rapidly on the higher-powered aircraft, and after a few weeks it was on to Luke Field, Arizona and advanced training on the North American AT-6.

When Class 42-K graduated in December 1942, Kenneth H. Dahlberg was one of the recipients of shiny silver wings and gold second lieutenant's bars. However, when orders for departure were posted he learned that he was being retained at Luke Field as an instructor. Though sorely disappointed not to receive orders to proceed to a combat-bound unit, the months that followed were to have a great bearing on his later combat success. He became an instructor for Chinese pilots flying the AT-6s and the Curtiss P-40.

After a year of throwing P-40s around the skies and spraying lead at simulated enemy aircraft, the long awaited orders finally came, and Ken departed for Tallahassee, Florida and transition training to newer and better fighter aircraft including the P-47. He finished whetting his precombat edge in the school for advanced combat tactics in Orlando and bid farewell to stateside duty.

Upon his arrival in England in the spring of 1944, Ken was immediately smitten by the greenery of the countryside, and his elation was further increased when he learned that he had been assigned to the "Pioneer Mustang" 354th Fighter Group based at Lashenden, in Kent. The 354th had been the first unit to fly the famed P-51 Mustang in combat in Europe, and after its initiation in battle it had racked up a brilliant record and was rated as one of the "hottest" organizations in the theater. A new replacement could hardly have gone into a less awe-inspiring squadron than the 353rd "Flying Cobras." In only a few short months of action the names of men like Jack Bradley, Glen Eagleston, Don Beerbower and Wallace Emmer had already become legend and headed the roster of 9th Air Force aces.

Captain Jack T. Bradley, commanding the squadron at the time, recalls Dahlberg. "Ken came in with several other replacements. Most of them had just come from the training bases where they had served as instructors. A lot of them had more flying time than many of our pilots, but they had a lot to learn about combat. When you get new pilots some of them have to be inspired, and a few of them have to be slowed down. Ken was definitely in the latter category. He was eager and wanted to get at the enemy right away, shoot down all his aircraft and go home. After flying with him I knew that if I could just calm him down a bit he would make one of the best."

Eager to please and anxious to impress, Ken Dahlberg lost little time in making his weight felt with the unit. On his fourth mission, 22 June 1944, he broke into the scoring column. The target was the Chartres

marshalling yards in France, and the Mustangs once more were pressed into their role as dive bombers. Ken peeled off to make his run and dove down to plant his bomb right on the tracks. Pulling up to regain formation with his leader, he sighted a Messerschmitt 109 flying a converging course. Swiftly sliding into position, he blasted away with his guns and shot him down.

On similar missions in support of the Normandy beachhead Ken experienced for the first time the turbulence of German Flak as he dove to low level to bomb and strafe the enemy's installations, armored columns, trains and troops on the ground. While there was little glory to be gained in exploding and shooting up targets on terra firma it was here that many of the pilots gained the most lasting satisfaction. As Dahlberg so aptly puts it, "There was nothing like seeing a tank left burning or a gun emplacement destroyed that made it easier for our ground troops to move up. The biggest event of a fighter pilot's day was to catch a German train moving down the tracks and go after the locomotive. When those slugs tore into the boiler and the steam let go it was more fun than being a kid at a 4th of July fireworks display."

On the 23rd of June 1944 the Group moved to Strip 2, near Criqueville, France. From this date forward the 354th operated strictly under field conditions. Tents became home, mud became an ever present nuisance and steel matting served as hardstand and runway for the fighters. Day after day the Mustangs flew from the dust or mud bowl, as the weather so dictated, to carry out their missions against the enemy.

Dahlberg scored his second victory on the 29th of June when he encountered what he describes as his "most formidable air opponent of the war" over Berriere, France. His flight met a number of yellow-nosed FW 190s that quickly demonstrated a lot of experience in aerial combat. One of the 190s got on his leader's tail, and Ken managed to fire a burst that caused him to break off the combat. Once he had him singled out, the two went round and round all the way to the deck. Twisting and turning, each pilot maneuvered desperately for position until finally Dahlberg managed to get in that crucial burst, sending the Focke Wulf crashing into the ground.

Ken's fiercest action and first great adventure took place on a mission near Dreux, France on the 16th of August. "I thought sure I had 'bought it' that day," he relates. "There were eight of us against 80 of them" The Mustangs were on a fighter sweep over the German lines when the air controller reported that twenty 109s had been sighted. The P-51s immediately sped to intercept. As they moved to engage, another 60 German planes poured from the overcast some 3000 feet above them.

"I lived a lifetime in those few minutes," says Dahlberg. "I clobbered one and he went straight into the ground burning. Everywhere you looked there was a Mustang mixing it with three or four Jerries. I chandelied up into the midst of a gaggle of 109s. I picked one and tapped him. He blew up, showering my plane with oil and debris. My visibility was almost nil due to oil on my windshield, but I managed to make out a lone 109 and headed for him. Just then I noticed my oil pressure was down. Someone must have gotten on my tail and shot at me, but in the excitement I never knew it until then. My gunsight was also out, but by watching the tracer bullets I was able to spray the 109. He blew up. Four other 109s hopped my tail at the same time and I knew I had to bail out. I headed for the clouds so that Jerry wouldn't clobber me as I got out."

Once in the clouds Ken went over the side and off into space. As quickly as he left his plane the din of combat disappeared, and as his parachute popped open silence prevailed. Slowly he descended to land on the estate of a prominent French family--Dennis and Madeline Baudoin.

Landing almost at the feet of Madame Baudoin, he had hardly spilled his parachute when she rushed up to him. "Run and hide immediately," she told him. "This whole



Curtiss TP-40N in which Dahlberg trained Chinese pilots at Luke Field, Arizona, during 1943. (USAAF)

Smile of victory crosses Ken Dahlberg's face after a successful combat sortie in the Mustang "Little Horse." (USAAF)



place is crawling with Germans."

Moving as swiftly as he could, he headed into the trees and brush and made his way to a stream. Quickly, he waded into the water and submerged his body until just his face was above the surface. Guttural words and sounds came to his ears as the German troops began to scour the grounds for the flier who had parachuted only a few minutes before. Resorting to a trick that many an American boy learned from Indian lore, he broke off a reed, put it in his mouth and ducked his head under the water. Here he remained for what seemed an eternity while the search continued.

Dahlberg finally ventured to raise his head but stuck close to the bank of the stream and made himself as inconspicuous as possible until night fell. Then he heard a low voice calling and cautiously he crept from the water and moved to answer. It was Dennis Baudoin, the owner of the estate, who had brought him food. After hastily downing a belated meal, he was shown to a small tent-like structure made of twigs and sticks that was to be his hiding place during his stay.

In the two or three days following, the Germans made further searches of the area, but Ken took to his hiding place and was never discovered. These were trying days, not only for the U. S. pilot but for his benefactors who would have been executed had they been found harboring him. When the immediate danger seemed to have passed, he was given civilian clothes and invited to come to the house to converse with this courageous couple and their children.

During his visits, Dahlberg and the Baudoins became close friends, and he was laughingly informed that were it not for the Germans, they would gladly take him into Paris, on whose outskirts the estate was located, and show him the town. This statement would become truth sooner than they realized for the U. S. Armies were hammering in that direction, and the city proper would be considered as liberated on the 25th of August. While the waiting game was in progress, Ken asked Dennis Baudoin if he had witnessed the combat in which he was downed. "Sure," stated the Frenchman, "and I saw the 109 that peppered you good."

Impatient for U. S. Forces to reach him, Ken decid-

ed that he should go out to meet them. Baudoin furnished bicycles and clothing, and they mounted up one morning and started the ride out. The roads were crowded with retreating Germans outbound and French people inbound. There was such confusion that the enemy was not taking the time to check on civilians. The two cyclists rode along unchallenged until they reached a village where the Americans were present in force. Amidst much acclaim and ado, the Mustang pilot was returned to U. S. control by his French comrade.

Ken wasted little time in getting back into combat and taking his toll of Germans. He was flying with his squadron consisting of 10 P-51s on an armed reconnaissance the 12th of September when they sighted an airfield near Limberg, Germany. Some 10 plus aircraft were parked on the field, so down to the deck went the Mustangs, zooming across the area at 450 miles per hour. After completing their passes, eight funeral pyres of German planes remained to attest to their untimely visit.

"I was going so fast that I couldn't steer my plane to aim," Dahlberg said later. "When we reformed at 7000 feet we sighted 40 Focke Wulf 190s 3000 feet above and took after them. As we closed in, 40 more 109s joined the fray. All I could say was, 'Here we go again!'"

Dahlberg hit his first two Germans in the cockpit area and each blew up with the first burst.

"As I pulled up from the second one, I got on the tail of another FW 190. As we started to climb, I cut his wing off with my bullets. The pilot bailed out. Then I heard someone screaming, 'Get this guy off my tail!' I looked around and saw an FW 190 riddling a Mustang, which, in turn, was firing on another 190. It was a regular merry-go-round. I dropped down to lend a hand, got some hits around the canopy and the Jerry went into the ground. In between these dogfights I was taking plenty of evasive action."

The squadron that day had scored 16 air victories, and this, coupled with the eight on the ground, gave them a total of 24. Two Mustangs were lost, but the pilot of one of them bailed out and landed safely.

By this time, Dahlberg had become one of the top scorers in the 354th Fighter Group and from all indications, one of its crack shots. Not so, says Jack Bradley, who by this time was Deputy Commander of the Group.

"Ken wasn't a good shot in the air. His success was due to his flying ability and intestinal fortitude. I had taught him that to compensate for his shooting he had to drive in and get in so close that he just couldn't miss. It takes a lot of guts and determination to do this, but he had plenty of both.

During this time, the Group had made a couple of moves in France, and it seemed that each time the weather and the mud got worse. Even though the pilots did their very best to make their tents livable, it was still a Spartan existence. Through Yankee ingenuity, and a bit of liberating materials, living quarters took on an aspect of home in the form of floors, walls, chairs and desks. The worst thing was the ever-rising water that came with the rains and the mud that seemed to be everywhere.

Several times during the early part of winter Dahlberg's hotel experience held him in good stead. He was selected to go to Paris on temporary duty to set up an officers' club for men who were in the famed "City of Lights" on leave. His connections with the Baudouins proved invaluable in this respect, in addition to the fact that they were then at liberty to really show him the town.

On 1 December 1944 the 354th moved to Meurthe-et-Moselle, France and Ken Dahlberg took off on a mission to dive bomb German transport in Germany. In the bad weather and general confusion of the mission, he and his wingman became separated from the squadron. Heading back toward the Allied lines and seeking further targets of opportunity, they came upon one of the Germans' new Messerschmitt Me 262 jet fighters flying down below them.

Diving down to the attack, they were sighted by the jet and it zoomed away from them. Sparring warily, the Luftwaffe pilot came back to engage, but Dahlberg's Mustang readily turned inside of him.

"Had I realized the true speed of the aircraft I would have had him dead to rights," says Ken. "But I miscalculated his airspeed and didn't compensate enough for him with the sight. Once I pulled the trigger, I knew I was off, and away he went like a rocket. I knew that there was no chance of catching him, so I gave up the chase."

Still stooging around, Dahlberg and his wingman came on 20 plus Messerschmitt 109s in the vicinity of Karlsruhe. Though about half of his ammunition was gone, Ken plunged into the formation with a frenzy. Taken by surprise and seemingly momentarily stunned, he was able to blast two of the Germans out of the sky before they could react. By this time the Mustangs were out and away on their run for home.

On arrival at base Ken was quite elated at this rare success but was shocked to learn that his wingman was really in a dither. "I'll never fly with you again," the pilot told him. "I thought that charging into all those Germans without a full load of ammo was darn poor judgment." C'est la guerre, thought Dahlberg as he walked away, for he was the type who always went to fight and hang the odds.

Dave Fortune smiled again on the flamboyant Dahlberg on 19 December when he slammed in to get three more victories and a probable. This previously described encounter brought his official score up to 14, and for this last multiple victory he was awarded the nation's second highest honor, the Distinguished Service Cross.

On December 26th the squadron was dive bombing in the St. Vith area of Belgium when the P-47 that Ken was flying received numerous hits from German flak. Immediately he took action to attempt a landing behind U. S. lines. However, as he approached under the overcast all hell broke loose! Ground fire seemed to come up at him from everywhere.

"Tracers and balls of fire were arcing all over the sky," says Dahlberg. "The GIs were taking no chances on getting strafed. The fact that the Luftwaffe had been using captured P-47s against them didn't help matters either. I nursed the battered Jug along as best I could and lined up on a spot between the lines. I came in hot and as the belly of the aircraft hit the ground, I took a heck of a jolt. Away we went, plowing up the ground, knocking down everything in our path until finally the ride came to a halt. Quickly, I jumped from the cockpit and headed for the nearest shell hole I could find. Small arms fire seemed to be coming from all directions. I was gasping for breath as my



Capt Dahlberg directs loading of ammunition in the wings of his P-47D during December 1944. He could never keep an aircraft long enough to name it. (USAAF)

chest felt like it was crushed on one side. I was later to learn that I had a number of cracked ribs. Keeping low in the hole, I heard the rumbling of an engine and cautiously peered over the side to see a Sherman tank heading my way. As it drew closer the hatch popped open and some guy hollered for me to get aboard in a hurry. I ran out as best I could and hoisted myself up over the tank tracks, and the man in the turret pulled me into the interior. I don't think I had ever suffered from claustrophobia until I got down in that thing and bounced around."

The metal monster carried him behind the lines, and he was transferred to a jeep which took him to an American command post. Here, as luck would have it, he encountered the commander of his own IX Fighter Command, General Elwood "Pete" Quesada. After taking only one look at the cold, wet pilot with the pained grimace, the General slipped out of his shiny new jacket, put it on Dahlberg and sent him to the hospital at Liege, Belgium for treatment.

After a week or so, Ken returned to the 354th at Meurtheet-Moselle. Weather continued to hamper combat operations, but whenever breaks occurred the P-47s were back in the skies bombing and strafing. German aircraft put in few appearances to deter the missions, but losses remained heavy for the fighter-bomber units as ground fire continued to take its toll.

Captain Kenneth Dahlberg flew his last combat mission and experienced his most miraculous escape on such a flight on Valentines Day, 14 February 1945. He had been leading two flights of eight P-47s divebombing rail yards and truck convoys behind the Siegfried Line when his luck ran out.

"We got by the light flak O.K.," he relates, "and had finished the mission and climbed to 10,000 feet to set course for home, when my plane received a direct hit by an 88 millimeter gun. The back of the cockpit was hit and the plane shot in two pieces. Everything went black momentarily, and suddenly I found myself tumbling through space. I gave the ripcord a jerk and once more experienced the sharp jolt that lets one know that the canopy has blossomed out above. Below I could see people running around with pitchforks and clubs awaiting my arrival. I drew my .45 from its holster and emptied the clip at them, and they took off in all directions. Then I hit the ground."

Once on solid earth Dahlberg spilled his parachute and took off for the nearest cover. Through brambles and bushes he went seeking cover that would hide him until nightfall when he could better attempt escape. On this occasion his actions were hampered by various and sundry cuts and bruises and a bad gash on his head that refused to quit bleeding. However, his drive and aggressiveness never deserted him and his determination to make it back to the U. S. lines never wavered.

When night fell he cautiously approached the bank of the Pruem River and swam to its western bank. A low fog hung over the area and without a compass or stars to guide him, Dahlberg found it most difficult to keep any sense of direction. All night he trudged along, hoping that his steps were taking him closer to the lines. Early the next morning he sighted a stream and approached it with a sinking feeling in his heart. It was the Pruem River! He had walked in a circle.

Now he was very weak from loss of blood and knew that he couldn't take a chance on waiting all day before attempting to make his way west again. He would just have to travel by day. After due consideration, he decided that he would try to bluff his way and set out down a road where the hike would be the easiest. Stumbling along on shaky legs, Ken made his way only a few miles before the inevitable happened. He met German troops who took him prisoner.

Once in enemy custody his wounds were dressed, and he was briefly interrogated by a German Army officer. After refusing to answer any questions, Ken was assigned one young German soldier for escort to an assembly

point for prisoners. With escape in his mind, Dahlberg gained the guard's confidence by answering his many queries about American movie stars, dance bands and the like. Throughout the day they walked along in light-hearted conversation.

At dusk the pair stopped at a water well to quench their thirst and Dahlberg saw his big chance. As the guard bent over to get water, Ken struck him with all his might. Without uttering a sound, the German fell on his face, unconscious. Quickly, the erstwhile prisoner took his keeper's pistol, stuck it in his pocket and threw his rifle in the brush.

Making his way along under cover of evening shadows, he came upon a French Citroen with Red Cross markings on it. Quickly taking advantage of the opportunity, Ken jumped into the cab of the ambulance, started up and sped westward down the road with the siren going. As check points were encountered, the screaming sound and the sign of international emergency seemed to be authority enough in that two were crossed without incident. Then a third loomed ahead, and this time a log served as a draw-gate. Still Dahlberg accelerated in the hope that the obstacle would be raised at the last minute, but such was not the case. The ensuing crash only succeeded in smashing the ambulance.

He was pulled roughly from the cab and gun butts and fists pummeled him. This treatment was to cost him four teeth. After being slapped and slugged, he was taken before a German officer who admonished him for attempting escape in a vehicle bearing the sign of mercy. Quick to reply, Dahlberg retorted, "If this is an ambulance, then what is all that ammunition stacked in the back end of it?" This ended the pointed inquiry.

After his recapture, Capt. Dahlberg was taken to Oberusal, an interrogation center for Allied airmen outside the city of Frankfurt, Germany. Here he was thrown into solitary confinement for several days before being taken before an officer for questioning. On entering the room the first query made in his direction was, "Well, Captain, how long do you think that it will be before we are on the same side fighting the Russians?"

Questions such as this were standard procedure in the routine psychological warfare methods used during World War II by Luftwaffe intelligence. The second, and most impressive point made on the prisoner was the unbelievable amount of information that the interrogator possessed on his unit and himself. Dahlberg was told all about the 354th Fighter Group, his squadron, and even about his own training and combat record. In the course of the interview Ken may have learned a bit about his unit, but the German learned nothing from him, so he was herded back to his cell.

Several days passed before Dahlberg was released from solitary and put into a small stockade with other Allied airmen to await transfer to a permanent type prison camp. The first move was made in this direction when the prisoners were marched under heavy guard from Frankfurt to Nurnberg. On this little trip Dahlberg made new acquaintances and gained strength for another escape attempt that would come when the men were moved again, this time from Nurnberg to Moosberg and Stalag 7A.

A few days out of Nurnberg, Ken and two other prisoners, one a Norwegian captain, slipped away from the marching column. This was accomplished with ease, for at this stage of the war many of the guards were deserting as the conflict in Europe was rapidly drawing to a close and the days of the Third Reich were numbered. The great risk was in the fact that all of Germany was an armed camp and anyone who was caught without proper credentials could be shot!

For three or four days the escapees lived off the land. Here Dahlberg's farm training paid off. Sleeping in barns by night, the men milked cows, gathered and ate raw eggs and made the most of whatever food

they could forage. The escapade ended when the men stumbled into a group of German SS troops. Fortunately, they weren't shot on the spot, but they were delivered to Moosberg prison camp.

"We lived like swine", Dahlberg recalls. "Where I slept there were 154 men housed in a building that would conveniently house no more than 30 men and we slept on the floor. I lost 30 pounds in the two and a half months that I stayed there. Main food was one loaf of black, sour bread to be split between seven of us each day. About the only other thing we got was a watery vegetable soup made from dehydrated stuff that was wormy. At this late date we were advised against escape attempts, so I stuck it out. The main thing that worried us during this time was that Hitler would use us for bargaining purposes in surrender. Then a mass revolt and break by the men would have been inevitable."

Liberation finally came in May when troops of the 86th Division of the U. S. Third Army rolled into the camp. For the men of Stalag 7A the war was finally over!

So ended the combat saga of Ken Dahlberg in World War II. During the time that he flew combat missions with the 354th Fighter Group, he had claimed fifteen and a half enemy aircraft destroyed in the air, and 14 of these were officially confirmed. For his exemplary record a grateful nation had awarded him the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross with one Oak Leaf Cluster, the Air Medal with fifteen Oak Leaf Clusters and the Purple Heart with one Oak Leaf Cluster.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Ken Dahlberg left the Army Air Force at the end of World War II and settled in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The drive and determination that carried him to success in the skies over Europe have continued in the world of business. A few years after his discharge he formed his own electronics firm which now enjoys international repute. As President of Dahlberg Electronics, Inc., makers of hearing aids and related

components, Ken still keeps his hand in, flying the company's new Beech King Air.

Several months ago it was the author's pleasure to visit with Ken Dahlberg and his wonderful family at their home on the banks of Lake Minnetonka. In the course of our conversation Ken mentioned that he had been recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross for his part in the combat of 19 December 1944 when he downed three enemy aircraft and probably destroyed a fourth. In the course of my research I learned that he had indeed been awarded the decoration though presentation had never been made nor had the recipient ever been informed of the award.

On January 24, 1967, a little over 22 years after he earned it, Ken Dahlberg was awarded his DSC at a formal ceremony in Washington, D. C. where no less than Vice President Hubert Humphrey did the honors. Witnessing the ceremony were General Joseph P. McConnell, Air Force Chief of Staff, Ken's proud family, Colonel Jack T. Bradley, Dahlberg's former squadron and group commander, and his wonderful friends from France, the Baudoins.

Without the whole-hearted cooperation of Mr. Dahlberg this article could never have been written. His many courtesies and kindnesses have made this project a memorable event for which I shall be eternally grateful. It is a genuine pleasure to dedicate this article to Mr. Ken Dahlberg, his gracious wife, Betty, and to his three children.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: This is Bill Hess' fourth article for the JOURNAL, and it helps give further proof of his outstanding abilities as an expert on the aces of the Second World War. Only this year has his first book been published, and it is appropriately titled, "The Allied Aces of World War II." During the war, Bill was a gunner in the 97th Bomb Group of the 15th Air Force. Today he lives at 9641 Kingston Road, Shreveport, Louisiana 71108.



Kenneth H. Dahlberg, center, receiving the Distinguished Service Cross from Vice President Hubert Humphrey a little over 22 years after he had earned it. At the left is General Joseph P. McConnell, Air Force Chief of Staff. (Dennis Brack)